

ESCAPE

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Radiohead

DECOMPRESSION



OASIS

throwing muses

MORPHINE

robyn hitchcock

PRICK

catherine wheel





"I didn't stop writing, I didn't stop playing, but I did stop thinking that anyone would care. I had a thing where I was going to set up my own library of songs and record two songs every three months and then when I'm 80 years old I'd have all these singles in my attic."

The video screen bursts with frenzied sexual action, as an adventurous female scientist runs a stiff tongue along a naked male subject. Blink and there's a tight close-up of her rapturous mouth enveloping his swollen penis, as blankly futuristic onlookers watch the torrid tableau with clinical detachment. The visual sensation stretches into forever: close-up scene upon close-up scene of infrared sex floods the eyes. Lips on penis, lips on breast, lips on clitoris, lips on lips... after about ten minutes I'm ready to put some lips on dinner. If this is erotic, they lost me a few sucks back. Maybe it's not supposed to be erotic: either that or I'm getting old.

Kevin McMahon, alias Prick, must be getting old along with me. I catch him glancing around the screening room with a bemused look on his lean features. Once in the elevator he claims it seemed like a weird government film, even if it was an entry into the New York Underground Film Festival. He felt like he was going to be tested for his true response.

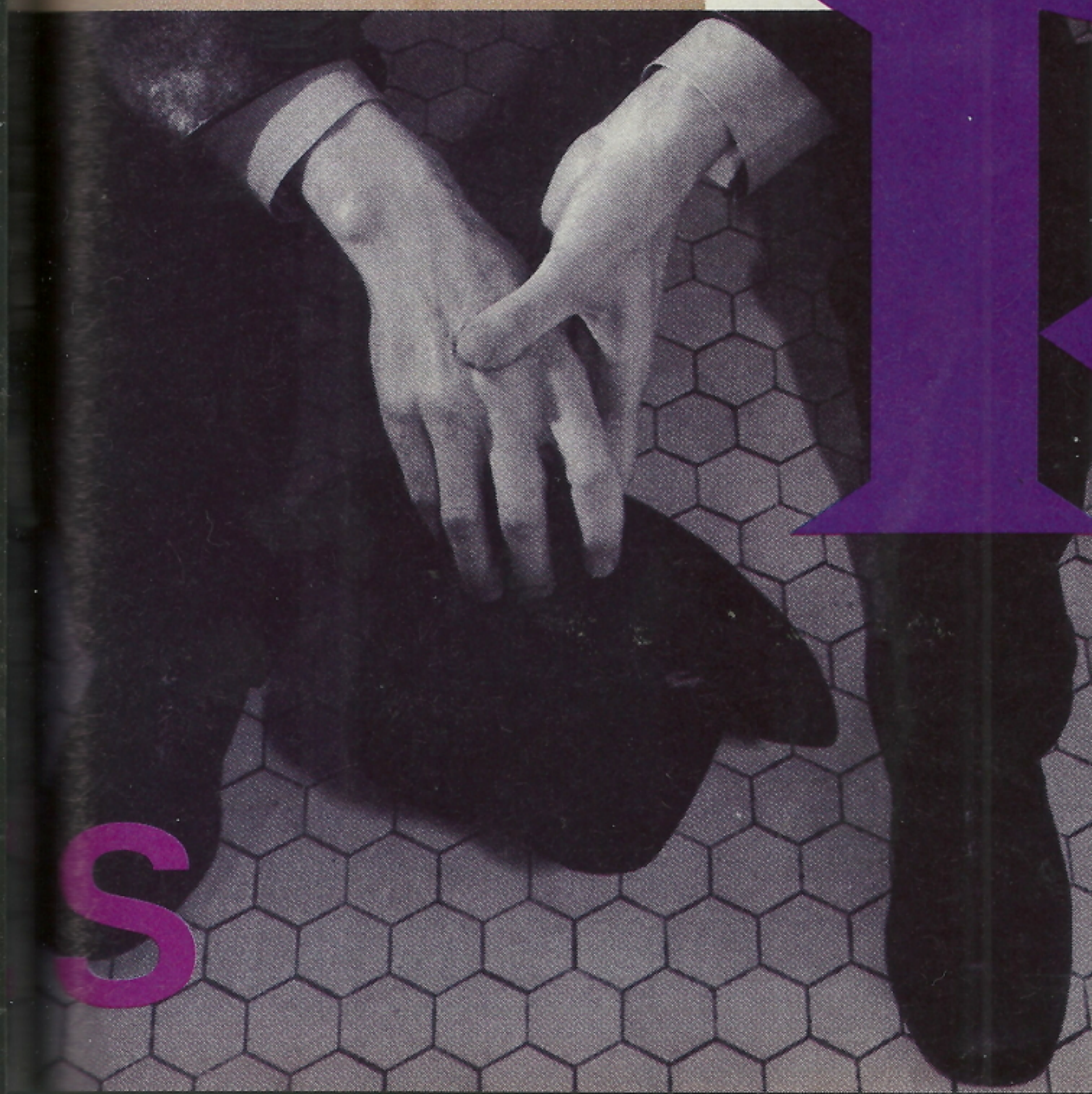
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It certainly was an interesting diversion on the way to the restaurant. It also served as a splendid metaphor for unbalanced quality of Prick's music...I just can't put my lips on the exact reason why.

Once settled into our destination, Kevin rearranges the menu choices into a dish he likes (everything reminds me of his music). I'm feeling brazen after that film, so I demand to know where has he been all my musical life?

Kevin laughs. "I've always been writing music. It's just that this album is the first thing that has gotten national distribution. I've done singles, and an EP, but they haven't gotten any national recognition. They've gotten some airplay at college, but... I didn't have a distributor.

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PRICK

(Continued from page 44)

I didn't have a distributor.

"I always try to have the same mentality as far as the songwriting, which...I don't know if I can give it to you in three or four words, what that mentality is..."

You can use as many words as you'd like... I'll listen and enjoy the novelty of hearing an newly signed recording artist who is definitely over 30 and has a reasons for writing. I'll enjoy the view, too. Kevin definitely attracts the eye in a fascinating manner.

"I try to incorporate a lot of different factors. Emotional and all the emotional things that come into play for that moment, as well as just my own life philosophy. If I am singing about this glass of water," as he examines his beverage glass, "I try to make it more than just a clinical study of a glass of water. I think of water, I think of the top of the mountain, or the sea, and I'll try to included an overall picture to sing it, as well as what it means to myself. I try to do thing while maintaining as many perspectives as I can."

That truly comes across throughout Prick's first full length album. The effect is like clutching fascination against your mind while holding it at arm's length. It's turning an emotional concept around and around and then passing it to someone else while mentally keeping ahold of it. It's a neat trick. It's a physical act of mental distancing, reaching many bizarre depths. Are people finding that in his music?

"Well, you found it," he grins before stabbing his pasta. "But hopefully the average listener will treat it as more than just background music, like they do to a lot of things. But to someone who approaches music like I do, when I really want to hear a record I sit down and *listen* to it. I don't think that's an inconvenience. It's like a movie; I want to invest my time in what this is. Sometimes it doesn't take the whole album. Usually I can tell if there's something in there

that I am gonna like, even if it isn't the first song. I can usually see there's something beyond.

"People choose certain lyrics that you know you can predict. Some predictability you can't avoid... it's the set up of what's to come. But when there's all set up and nothing to come, then it just becomes really mundane, and it doesn't hold the interest.

"So I hope people will spend some time with this, and not just toss it on and get the same type of ass-shaking dance reaction they they'd get from something else. Or that they're playing it because they heard from someone that it sounds like someone else... then if it doesn't sound exactly like that other person, then forget it. You're outta there."

Let's get it over with: the other person in question is Trent Reznor. Kevin has been getting a lot of shit for having his long time friend Trent play on and produce part of this album. Even writers on this staff went who is he kidding? It's NIN all over the place.

Ah, but they are so wrong. Try on the fact that Trent was in Kevin's band before he went supernova and you might think twice about who influenced who...

You also might listen to this album in an entirely new way. Unlike Trent Reznor, with his nagging need to reveal abuse after abuse, Kevin offers a wild journey through emotions and experiences, written by a man who lets you think you know where he's taking you before he lets go of your hand and leaves you find your way back while you're spinning in free fall. There's no heroes, no villains, no real angst: then again, there's all that and more. No fair fights and no clear answers given.

Kevin's intense lyrics also play a crucial part in his songs. His word play is both meaningful and distancing, and he has definite reasons for leaving those intriguing lyrics out of the CD booklet.

"I always thought I would have lyrics," he confesses. "But when I

was writing them down, I noticed it was hard for me to decide where to end the line, or paragraph... or to decide what form to put it in. I tried writing them all in a straight line in my word processor, but that was an uncomfortable read for me. So that didn't work.

Plus the spelling of the words; there are some words where the spelling changes the meaning, and I have several of those on the record. I could choose one, but that meant I was choosing that chorus and that meaning. Or I could put like vain, in 'Crack', the shell around the vain, the cracking of this guy's ego, if I put the v-a-i-n, it's almost so... the first impression, the most obvious ones would be the sexual connections of that song. Then there's the v-e-i-n.. I wanted to leave it spoken. It's something for the listener to discover, and it's also means not committing one way or another, which is something I don't want to do.

"It's not so much me not knowing what I want to do, it's what I want to say. I want to say *both*, because that's what it's about. I'm not running for politics, I don't need to have platforms," he grins.

I'd vote for you. Kevin's craft is using words to their full effect, for their twisted wonderful quality. So how does Kevin come by these cunningly corrupt songs?

"Usually I start with the lyrics and the melody line at the same time, then I get around to figuring what the chord structure is going to be used to support that. Then I throw that off to make it sound more surreal. Then when I have that all together I come in and straighten out the words, deciding if it needs another verse or...verse is not a term I'd use, but I go to the tagline on the chorus and I repeat that. Sometimes it's good to repeat the thing that seems the least repeatable. Like in 'Crack,' for example, repeating the first and second verse a third and fourth time. I had more lines for that, but I thought that it made more sense to be obviously repetitious, just like going at something again even though you know you've made a mistake and you still push into the same situation. When you have a breakdown it's different the second time around. The musical breakdown is different from the first time around. But that's the only song like that.

"Most of the songs I tried to make different from each other. If I see myself going with the same thing I try not to rely on that."

There's the beauty of this album. The listener has nothing to grab onto in the torrent of sound. There's no place to get comfortable and easily predict what's going to come next. The turns are hard and abrupt...

"That could be a problem," he dryly concludes.

Just the difference between the opener, 'Communique,' with its feral slam and the closing song, 'Make Believe,' is immense. 'Make Believe' is a truly depressing song.

Kevin cocks his head. "Is it? I think it's sort of melancholy but..."

It's depressing to me. The person is ready to jump off a cliff at the end of that song.

"Yeah, but he's not going to fall, he's going to dissipate."

It's still depressing.

Kevin laughs, declaring, "Dissipating or falling, it's all the same to you: he's just going off the edge of that cliff."

That's right. Going off cliffs isn't healthy. Due to its end slot it dwells in your head. Then again, most of the songs dwell after it's over... This album sounds too perfect for a first album. It makes so much sense that Kevin's been working at his craft for years now.

"Well, a few of the songs have been around for a while now. It's not that I consider those songs old and from another time; maybe their gestation period was longer. I began to write and record them back then, but I've been adding to them, or they've gone through different musicians or different instruments or a few lyrical changes. I usually keep the lyrics the same through the years, unless I discover a way to give them more depth, then I go for that. Rather than cleaning it up to make it more clear, I change them..."

Probably the initial integrity of the songs remain intact through the process... like Kevin's reason for writing it.

"That part of it stays," he agrees. "I think that the whole thing that was going on in my head stays the same. It's always been the same... it's always been rather confusing to me," he laughs.

"When I was looking for a deal in Los Angeles, before I got together with Trent, I was talking to some major labels. Things were

happening, there were offers from some of the others I wanted to go with, then Trent's schedule opened up, and we always wanted to record together, because he played in my group for a while before his record took off. So when we got together it was in New Orleans at this studio. Then I had that, and I went back to the other labels that I was already talking to, and I said I have new songs, let's keep talking, let the lawyers do their things. But talking with John and Trent, this was when they were first starting Nothing Records, it seemed to me like that would be the place where I'd have the most freedom. Even if someday so and so records said we like you, it sounds great, you could do whatever you want... who's to know when that was going to happen. But when people that you're friends with, I've known John five years before they started the label, and when they tell me they're not going to fuck with me... they know who I am, they know I am not going to change things... I may not have the most definable musical style or personal image... When they say they are going to be open about that, that seemed like the direction. Right before this deal with Nothing I almost went with another major."

He admits he confused a few labels with his sound. He confused me with his sound. "Now that's your job as a writer. You have to put that label on it. That's right," he grins fixing his fork prongs in my direction.

I don't like labels, dear sir. (pssst.. yeah, you...aggro-glam, anyone?) Another intriguing aspect to the songs is this, and here I am going to get myself into trouble, judgmental aspect. 'Animal,' has an obvious target and 'Other People,' is full of complete disgust with shallow relations and casual emotion abuse.

"Yes, in 'Other People' there is an outcry against that. But whether that's judgment or not... judgment to me is not something I want to be doing. But if it's bringing that kind of attention to a concern of mine, then that's true. That's something that I personally just can't do; go out, meet someone and then five minutes later fuck them. I just can't. But I wanted to reverse it into a situation where that character changes: I mean where is the voice of that person in that song? Is it from the women's point of view? Or is it from this guy who is talking to her?

Or is it this other women who is talking to her? I try to somehow get beneath the skin with dealing with relationships. so that there isn't a gender thing happening. There's a human thing happening but then there isn't. There's a relationship thing we're talking about, but to not have to be confined or confused by the environmental baggage of skin. That's pretty much what I am talking about, but I don't know if that is a judgment," he muses. "Because at the same time I am saying walk in my heels then you're free to argue: to have that kind of mind-set where you are

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totally protected and you want to have everything be almost romantic to the point that you can't get into a relationship unless it's going to be perfectly pure and totally fulfill all of your expectations. I mean that's nice, that's great, but at the same time it's a turn off to people if they don't know that. I think that's a judgment, and that's cutting off a lot of human people. That's the mortal sin mentality: you did

being? If you believe something... I think that it is. And it's hard to get physical existence up to our standards or be able to practice what you think, or practice what you wish things would be. But if you're striving, then that becomes you. Striving becomes you. As much as the inability to reach or achieve, striving becomes you. So that's me, me trying to do things, failing, doing and failing..."

There's that depth again that supports Prick's harsher songs that are, on the surface, bundles of ranting hysteria. There's no black and white, but a complete pallet erupting under the skin.

"That's what I don't like about most music like that," agrees Kevin. "It doesn't go beyond that. When somebody really loves music, like I do, it draws me away. I am surprised I am able to converse because there's something going on in the background."

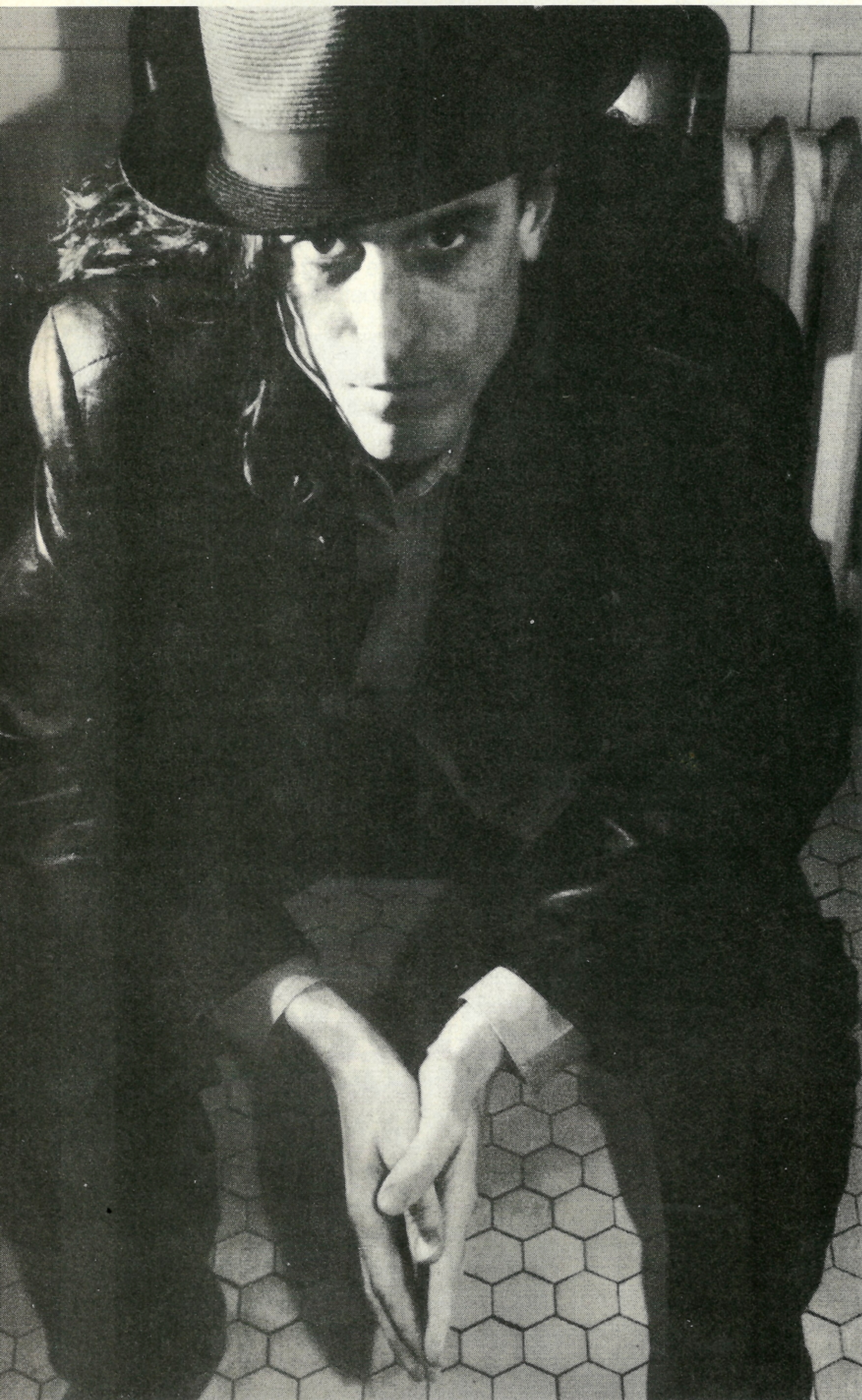
A steady stream of jazz did accompany our talk: I tuned it out. He was in touch with it. "If I don't concentrate I can tune out..." he laughs, exclaiming, "now I forgot what I was talking about! There's nothing beneath the aggression of the sonics themselves, and I don't want there to just be anger or anxiety, I don't just want only that stuff to be under there. Because a lot of that stuff, that's not the answer to it. The anger and anxiety is caused by a need for something which is the opposite of that. But that comes without saying it, like from a schoolteacher's standpoint where this is in a book and I tell you this and then you'll know it. How can you *not* know what I am talking about? I just told you... that has to be conveyed and experienced vicariously through hopefully experiencing what I am saying, what I am giving out as that kind of confusion from inside of me. Maybe you have to get in there and feel it, feel how strange it is, then maybe next time you're in a confused situation, you can say well at least someone else has that. You're not so isolated. Not being so isolated is a mellowing thing.

"To put it to new age music or something, that's for maybe the people who don't need to hear it," he smiles. "Most of these songs could be just sung with acoustic guitar, as songs. They're not based around fuck 'em fuck 'em rhythms," he laughs. "Although I think that's effective occasionally, but that's just not my thing. That's one of the colors on my palette, but I rarely use it."

No one has to worry about Kevin doing another album of this superior caliber: since he's been working on music for years, he has an huge arsenal of older material which he plans to merge with his newer work, much as he did on this album. "That's probably how I'll do the next twenty albums. I may change that and do something brand new for the next record, but I just think when I write a song I don't mean it to be towards that particular time. If I use something that's topical in a song, then it's only one of the elements. it's not the main thing the songs revolves around. The main thing is something that was alive when I was born, and it's going to be alive all the way until I die. That's what I spin the things around. So whether or not they're in or out of fashion lies in the production work."

What was Kevin's frustration level? Here he was creating this amazing work, watching lesser bands get signed and go on to make a name for themselves. How close did he come to saying oh fuck this... or was it all too important to him?

Kevin gives a low laugh, admitting, "Oh yeah, there's times when I thought like that. I didn't stop writing, I didn't stop playing, but I did stop thinking that anyone would *care*. I had a thing where I was going to just set up my own little library of songs and record two songs every three months and then when I'm 80 years old I'd have all these singles in my attic. It seemed like it really didn't matter, cause it was getting to the point where I wasn't really communicating this to anyone other than friends and family. And even that was... people after a period of time, it's hard for then to look at just the work itself, without the personality that's involved. They see the personality going through it and they can't break me as an ego out of the song. Who are you writing about or who are you talking



something wrong, or not up to the social standard of this time: you are scandalized forever. You're not included in our club of the pure. So it's from both sides of the characters in that particular song. They are just trying to show a plea for tolerance from both sides, rather than there's just one point of view.

"But at the same time I do not want to be preaching, and that's the hard thing with songs like that," he concludes.

There's that whole distancing act: having three different points of views in one song is no mean feat. So how much of Kevin actually shows up?

"I think I am in all of them," he laughs. "I don't..." he pauses to think this over, continuing, "when you say you believe in something is that enough to... does that constitute your personality of your

about? Are you talking about *me* like that? Do you think *you* are like that because you're *not* like that," he shakes his head. "So sure, there were times where I was going to give up on pursuing it. But then you have resurgences and I would hear songs on the radio that seemed that the industry was getting a little more liberal. That gave me the inspiration. Playing live is good for me too. I don't like the point up until I hit the stage, or really too much after, but when I am there it seems like I am in a good place of my being, maybe because of what we were talking about earlier, that is where I really live. So getting back to playing, if I would give it up for a while I would miss it too much."

Kevin is toying with touring plans, the first being a brief opening stint for Neds Atomic Dustbin. He laughs, declaring, "I am not going to do the six guys driving around in a van not getting any sleep sharing a hotel room for a shower kind of bullshit."

I can understand that. Kevin's not in the 18 to 22 oh gee, I'm in a band and I am just so excited phase.

"I just can't work myself up to that kind of frenzy anymore... I can barely get to the show," he laughs.

Still, this music is too much a part of Kevin for him to ever stop. When Trent finally recorded with him it rapidly created new musical angles for both. "We were the only musicians. We both play lots of stuff, drums, keyboards, guitars, bass... so we would just, like if I had a bass in my hand I would play the bass, and he did the programming. But it's mostly my guitar and bass on the album, and most of the keyboards. Then in London it was the same thing, I did most of the stuff. Warren played most of the bass, and the guy who plays guitar in my band right now, I had him come over and play on a couple of things mainly for a little different breath into the songs. For his sake as far as being in the band I wanted to give him something to eat and happiness as a player," he smiles.

Kevin does have a band for live performances, describing he spent a year and a half finding compatible players.

"I think they really dig the tunes and they want to be in a band that's happening. And hopefully we'll turn into a band band, where they'll work on the next record. But that's not for sure. But I am open for it: right now I am open for anything except stopping. Any way it goes will be OK. The only thing which is uncomfortable for me, or which I stress out about, is the time it takes to do things, to record the record. The recording process then leads to it getting out, which just takes too long. I am writing songs now so..."

The waitress comes over to check on the status of the credit card which had been left in our possession by Kevin's publicist. Kevin gives a wonderful smile and claims, "We'll give it back to her after we go somewhere. Hmm, I feel like taking a flight..."

I feel like going somewhere I've never been before... how about a flight to Paris? Are we up for that?

Kevin imitates making a transatlantic phone call. "Hallllo... hallllo?"

The waitress is looking at us with great suspicion. Don't worry, we're really very dull and would never do anything like that.

"Especially since we're admitting it," laughs Kevin.

On tape yet... even Marcia Clark could nail us with that evidence.

"Who is Marcia Clark?"

It's an E.F. Hutton moment. Kevin is living in LA and he doesn't know who Marcia Clark is? Really?

He's just smiling and shaking his head. Kevin, she's the *prosecutor* in the O.J. Simpson trial.

Kevin gives a small shrug. "I know nothing about this trial."

I really like this guy now. I have encountered people who may not know about other bands, but...

Kevin explains, "I don't have a TV, and I just know that the guy is up for murder, but beyond that I don't know anything. That was one of the things in England while we were recording, Alan Moulder, he's like, 'Look at this, what is with the people in your country? They've been chasing this bloody white car around all day... look at the whimpy chase!' he laughs, causing himself amusement at his appalling British accent. He should stick to Jack Nicholson."

Since Kevin brought Britain up let's contrasting the two recording sessions. Kevin instantly replies that the experiences were quite different. Was the original plan to work with Trent all the way through or was Kevin planning to break it up?

"That was open. We knew... actually, it didn't even start out that he was going to produce: we were just going to get together to see if we'd work out well. It was an artistic thing, and these would be another four songs that would end up in the closet. So we just went into his house and decided to work together and have some fun. It turned out great. The songs were already written, so we didn't have to go through any growing pains of writing together, or how has what part: what are our boundaries... all the compromises that come up when you go to write with somebody. That was taken care of. I was prepared to have him take care of the programming of it, cause he's a whiz at it. So working with him was relaxed, we're friends, let's get together and see what happens. Then when I got together with Warren I didn't know what was going to happen. That was me getting thrown into a brand new situation. All of my recordings I had done by myself, producing... I didn't even know I was producing. All I knew is that I was paying for it," he laughs. "But then after Trent I didn't know what it was going to be like: would I have that same built-in rapport with the producer, or what. But Warren seemed to sense that in me, and I could pretty much set the pace with the way things worked in our relationship. He was totally cool, and assumed a role that I didn't feel comfortable with: the laboring over sounds or knowing when to quit. I like to quit a half an hour into the thing, or 30 hours into the thing. I can't find a moderate work schedule at all. That's fine when you are by yourself, but when you have other technicians involved, other musicians, and money involved..." he trails off with a laugh.

Say no more. Since you have a huge catalog to choose from, how did you decide who to work with what on?

"Probably at the time I started to work with Trent and getting everything together I had two hundred songs. Knowing that I was going to work with Trent I took out a lot of them even though as I was saying before in production you can pretty much make Stormy Weather work. But I thought some things would work better than others, so I narrowed them down for a good first get together with Trent. There were a few songs that he had played when he was in the band. He just picked which ones were his favorite and what we wanted to do at the time, and then we tossed a new one in for the hell of it. I did the same thing with Warren: I narrowed it down to what I wanted, then I let him... there was no sense in trying to force someone who essentially going to be the other half of the band into something they didn't have an infinity for. It wasn't a compromise to me: I wrote them, so I wouldn't lose anything if he picked that one or this one cause I'll spend the rest of my life deciding too."

That's a novel way to work because most people only have x amount of songs and they are very precious about them. This is like opening up a closet and picking and choosing from a myriad of styles. But surely there had to be some songs you were more precious about?

Kevin shakes his head and murmurs, "No. Cause I think there's going to be other albums, and I'll get them on there."

Just try and stop him.

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